

CHAPTER II

THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

UNFORTUNATELY for the fame of Diocletian **LJ** there is one indelible blot upon the record of his reign. He attached his name to the edicts whereby was let loose upon the Christian Church the last and — in certain provinces—the fiercest of the persecutions. Inasmuch as the affairs of the Christian Church will demand so large a share of our attention in dealing with the religious policy of Constantine, it will be well here to describe, as briefly as possible, its condition in the reign of Diocletian. It has been computed that towards the end of the third century the population of the Roman Empire numbered about a hundred millions. What proportion were Christians ? No one can say with certainty, but they were far more numerous in the East than in the West, among the Greek-speaking peoples of Asia than among the Latin-speaking peoples of Europe. Perhaps if we reckon them at a twelfth of the whole we shall rather underestimate than overestimate their number, while in certain portions of Asia and Syria they were probably at least one in five. Christianity had spread with amazing rapidity